

Documenting Colombia's suffering, hope

Justapaz, peace council release second report on the violence against churches.

Some Colombian government statistics suggest that human rights violations are improving in Colombia, but the churches offer a fuller version of what's happening in their recently released second report on human rights called "A Prophetic Call."

Janna Hunter-Bowman, a Mennonite Central Committee worker, coordinates a documentation and advocacy program that records the suffering and hope of the Colombian Protestant churches. Justapaz, a Colombian Mennonite peace and justice organization, and the Peace Commission of the Evangelical Council of Colombia released their second report on the violence suffered by the Protestant churches.

Hunter-Bowman says the report indicates there is still "a long way to go in achieving peace, and the conflict can't be solved militarily."

This report on international humanitarian law and human rights violations against church and church members documents findings from all of 2006.

Regional team members and church members are being trained in an ongoing process to gather testimonies from victims, their family members and church leaders. The information collected included 16 homicides and many cases of people who were forced to flee, used as human shields, tortured or submitted to other human rights violations. Death threats were the most common form of aggression.

The groups perpetrating these violations come from different armed groups. They belong to guer-

rilla groups, paramilitaries and government forces.

Many who shared their stories were afraid, Hunter-Bowman says. They didn't know if their sharing would bring more persecution to their families. In spite of the intimidation, the survivors still speak.

Further concerns about safety were raised when the offices of Justapaz were burglarized on June 14. Two computers containing information important to the report were stolen. One had a database of testimonies detailing abuse and information on how churches were working for peace.

Justapaz has continued its work of reporting without further harassment. Hunter-Bowman attributes this in part to the "grace we experience because of the prayer and advocacy on the part of the church."

"In suffering there [are] always signs of hope," says Alix Lozano, president of the Mennonite Church of Colombia.

Javier Pinzón, whose testimony is in the report, is an example of this transformation. A colonel in the military for 28 years, he resigned because he "in no way could continue taking up arms and preparing for war." He found the Mennonite Brethren Church and committed his life to Christ. Today Pinzón is farming, with the goal of creating an Anabaptist community to serve the rural community of El Rodeo. With others he is starting a program to teach children to care for the land.—Cathryn Clinton of Mennonite Central Committee

In suffering there are always signs of hope.

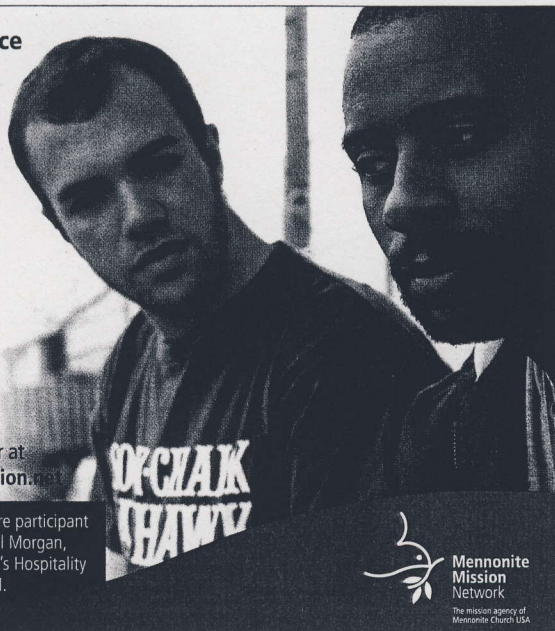
—Alix Lozano

"We found Service Adventure to be an invaluable opportunity for our son, one that helped focus his interests before entering college."

> Barth Hague, parent of C.J. (left)

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C.J. Hague, Service Adventure participant from 2006–07, with Hershul Morgan, who takes classes at Martin's Hospitality Center, in Albuquerque, N.M.



Political advocacy for Colombian Anabaptists

"We don't talk about politics, yet at the same time there are people in our churches who are living it passionately," says Manuel Mosquera of the Mennonite Brethren Church in Colombia. Mosquera and 36 leaders and members of Colombian Anabaptist denominations gathered to share their perspectives and vision of political advocacy Oct. 30–Nov. 1, 2007. The gathering in Bogotá was sponsored by Mennonite Central Committee and brought together representatives from the Mennonite Church, Brethren in Christ Church and the Mennonite Brethren Church. Speakers shared their perspectives on Colombia's political and social realities. Panel discussions focused on the biblical basis, models and values for political advocacy. Arturo Orrego of the Brethren in Christ Church asked participants to recognize that in politics, taking a neutral stance is the same as taking a position of silent approval.—Shalom Wiebè of Mennonite Central Committee